

## **Mother-tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB MLE) in the Indian State of Odisha: Issues, Challenges and Impact**

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### **Introduction**

Mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB MLE) involves instruction in a child's L1, usually with the intention of gradually progressing to a L2 or L3 at a later point of time in primary school. In a multilingual context, children begin their studies in a familiar language, and later, they are introduced to those concepts in the dominant state language. MTB MLE programme is particularly beneficial during early childhood schooling - from grade one till grade five. When children are taught in languages they are familiar with, it generates interest in the subject, increases their confidence, and motivates them towards learning. Existing literature (Pattanayak, 1981; Fishman, 1996; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Baker, 2000; Cummins, 2000, 2001; Magga et al, 2004; Skutnaab-Kangas, 2000, 2009) is unanimous on the benefits of mother tongue development in contexts where multiple languages are used for variety of purposes. According to Kelkar (1994) "own language" learning has a "beneficial effect on other language learning and teaching." Lightbrown and Spada (2013) have also observed that continued development of the home language contributes substantially to successful acquisition of the school language in the long run. With census 2001 returning 234 mother tongues with speaker strength of 10,000 and above, India certainly is a fertile ground for practicing MTB MLE for linguistic and educational development of children. Cummins (2001) even goes so far to say that, "to reject a child's language in the school is to reject the child."

MTB MLE as a strategy for addressing high student drop-out rate and poor educational performance in school education in tribal regions is well-established today in India (Pattanayak, 1981, 1990; Kundu, 1994; Jhingran, 2009; Panda & Mohanty, 2009; Mohanty & Saikia, 2009). Odisha is one of the pioneering states to have adopted this policy to reduce high student drop-out rate among primary school students in tribal regions of the state. According to the Odisha Economic Survey, 2013-2014, student dropout rate in the state has today reduced from 37.07% at upper primary level in 2005-06 to 3.38% in 2012-13. Combination of several beneficial programmes like, free midday meal scheme, free books and uniforms, and free hostel facilities for Schedule Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) children, which the Odisha government has introduced at the school level to address the high dropout rate prevailing earlier, have been instrumental in reducing the dropout rate. MLE scheme is just one beneficial schemes of the government among many others targeted towards the ST students. But it is definitely an important factor, as language plays a fundamental role in the development of a child as a social being (Khubchandani, 1994). When a child's mother language is given less importance and permitted to be supplanted so fast that the

grandparents find it difficult to communicate with the grandchildren, then the very root of a child becomes fragile leading to lack of any family cohesion, let alone any wider social grouping (Bauer, Holmes, Warren, 2006). Ahearn (2012) suggests that in multilingual communities, social hierarchies are determined from the manner the languages, dialects, or registers are used by the various speaker communities. Certain languages thus get labelled 'prestigious', while others are 'stigmatized'. Ultimately it might lead to language loss, or decrease in language proficiency, as the number of individuals using a less prestigious language would decrease down the generations. Here we can cite the example of languages such as Manx that have totally disappeared because all those who once spoke the language have lost proficiency in it, and today there are no speakers left who actually speak the language (Bauer, Holmes, Warren, 2006). On a similar vein we can also cite the examples of Indian indigenous languages like Oraon, Kisan, Khadia and Munda which are today designated as endangered because of a steady decline in intergenerational transmission of the languages among the users of the language (Mohanty, 2014). Additionally, quality education being the cornerstone of economic development, the medium of language through which children access education during their formative years, determine their overall educational performance in the school years (Mohanty, 2009).

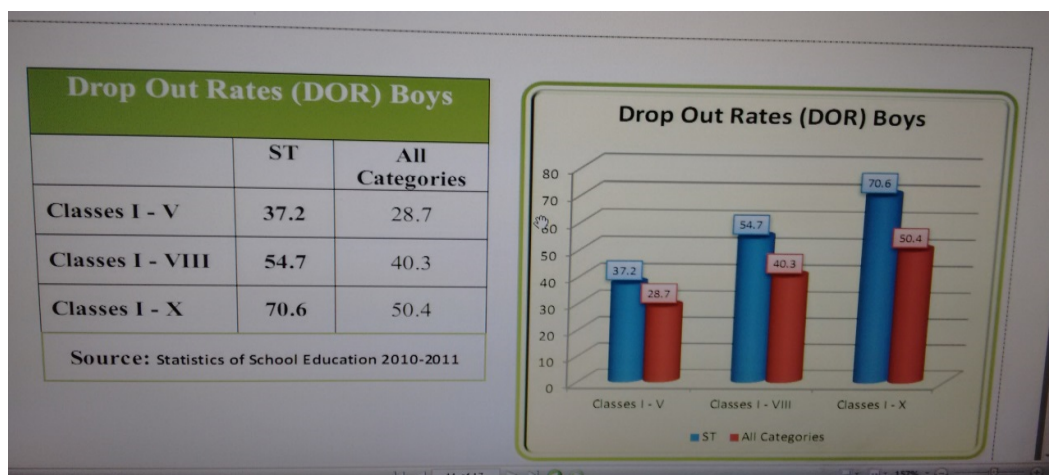
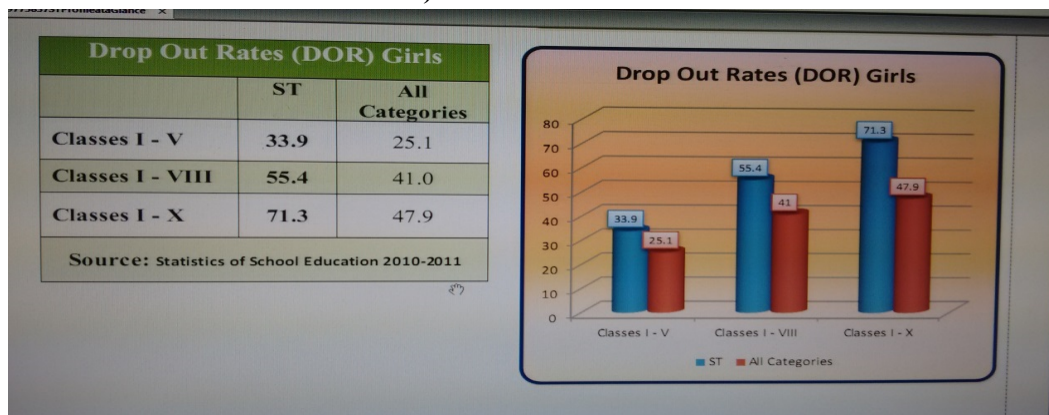
### **Background of the Study**

As per available information MTB MLE programme in the state of Odisha is functional since 2007. According to a government notification dated 1<sup>st</sup> July 2014, the MLE programme in Odisha 'shall be continued and extended to all tribal children in the state in a phased manner.' This paper reports on a study undertaken in the tribal dominated district of Sundargarh to generate information on the issues and challenges involved in the implementation of the MTB MLE programme in the district. In addition, the study also aimed at generating information on the impact the programme has had on those tribal students who have been a part of this programme and have today graduated to the senior classes. Sundargarh district even though being a scheduled district of the state with the tribal population exceeding 50% of the total population of the district, still houses industrial and cosmopolitan towns like, Rourkela, Rajgangpur, Kanskahal, Biramitrapur and Sundargarh main. Because of the presence of Rourkela Steel Plant of the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), it is relatively a more advanced district compared to the other scheduled districts of the state. The languages spoken in the area are multiple and varied.

Odisha occupies a unique position in the tribal map of India. As per 2011 Census, the ST population of the state is 95, 90, 756 constituting 22.85% of the total population of the state and 9.7% of the total tribal population of the country. It has 62 different tribal communities including 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). The state ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> among all states relating to the percentage of tribal population to the total population of the state, leaving aside some of the northeast states that are predominately tribal dominated. The scheduled areas constituting 46.8% of the total area of the state

contains 60.65% of the total tribal population of the state. The rest are distributed among almost all the districts. The tribals of the state are either speakers of languages belonging to the Munda family or the Dravidian family. Odisha with 56.58% of its population below poverty line, and with a tribal literacy rate of 52.24% as compared to total state literacy rate of 72.87%, presents a miserable picture as far as deprivation and distress of tribals is concerned. Education is obviously a way out from the serious hardships that the tribals of India face today in their quest for survival. And the medium of language that the tribal child faces in school in the preliminary years of learning is one of the key factors that determine how long the tribal child will stay in the school system. Yet, looking at the overall school dropout rate in India, as per census 2011, starting from grades 1 – V, 35.55% for STs compared with 26.9% for all (a gap of 8.65%); to grades 1 – VIII, 55.05% for STs compared with 40.51% for all (a gap of 14.54%); to grades 1 – X, 70.95% for STs compared with 49.15% for all (a gap of 21.8%), we can say that a lot still remains to be done to bring parity among tribal and non-tribal students (Caption 1). With 100% enrolment at the grade 1 level, even after 68 years of India's independence, it is the tribal child who is observed to be suffering the most among all categories of children of the country (Caption 2).

**Caption 1: Dropout Rate among ST Students from Grades I – X (Source: Statistics of School Education 2010 – 2011)**



**Caption 2: ST Students' Enrolment and Dropout Rates from Grades I till XII**  
(Source: Statistics of School Education 2010 – 2011)

Percentage of ST Students who entered Class I and Studied up to Class XII							Percentage of ST Students who Discontinued Studies at Different Levels from Class I to Class XII						
Class	BOYS		GIRLS		TOTAL		Class	BOYS		GIRLS		TOTAL	
	All India	ST	All India	ST	All India	ST		All India	ST	All India	ST	All India	ST
I	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	I						
II	90.4	84.0	92.2	86.0	91.3	84.9	II	9.6	16.0	7.8	14.0	8.7	15.1
III	87.2	77.3	89.1	79.3	88.1	78.3	III	3.1	6.7	3.1	6.6	3.1	6.7
IV	83.9	70.9	84.6	73.2	84.2	72.0	IV	3.3	6.3	4.5	6.1	3.9	6.2
V	79.8	65.8	79.0	67.5	79.4	66.6	V	4.1	5.2	5.6	5.8	4.8	5.5
VI	72.2	55.1	71.5	55.9	71.9	55.5	VI	7.6	10.0	7.5	11.6	7.5	11.1
VII	68.0	49.1	66.6	49.4	67.3	49.3	VII	4.2	6.0	5.0	6.5	4.6	6.2
VIII	65.2	42.8	62.6	40.9	63.9	41.9	VIII	2.8	6.3	4.0	8.5	3.4	7.4
IX	57.4	34.1	51.8	29.9	54.7	32.1	IX	7.8	8.7	10.8	11.0	9.2	9.8
X	51.9	28.2	46.5	24.9	49.3	26.7	X	5.6	5.9	5.3	5.0	5.4	5.4
XI	35.5	17.3	30.8	14.0	33.3	15.7	XI	16.3	10.0	15.7	10.9	16.1	10.9
XII	32.4	15.3	28.0	12.3	30.3	13.9	XII	3.1	2.0	2.8	1.7	2.9	1.9

Analysis of the available statistics relating to the percentage of ST students who have discontinued their studies (Caption 2) from class I to class XII reveals some interesting figures. The dropout rate is highest among students in class II (15.1%), gradually declining till class V, when suddenly in class VI (11.1%) it goes on an upward spiral, reduces again in classes VII and VIII, then increases noticeably in class IX, only to decline steeply again in class X. Interestingly, the dropout rate gets into double figures again in class XI, but reduces remarkably in class XII. Dropout rate being highest in class II certainly suggests that a gap in language and communication among teachers and students, or in the school system itself could be a major influencing factor that is playing a role here.

Taking cognizance of these issues, and to address the language gap faced by the tribal children the government of Odisha started the MLE programme in selected primary schools in 2007, according to information available on official government websites. The idea was to enable the students to 'develop appropriate cognitive and reasoning skills and to acquire proficiency in other languages' (School and Mass Education Dept. Notification, 2014). In the selected schools the child's mother-tongue is used as the medium of instruction for the first five years. Odia is taught as the second language from Class II and English is introduced as a language subject from Class III onwards.

Initially, the programme was started in 10 tribal languages - Munda, Santhali, Kisan, Oraon, Kuvi, Saura, Koya, Bonda, Juanga and Kui. Some of these languages have the highest number of speakers in the state of Odisha, among all the tribal groups (Santhali, Kisan, Munda, Oraon, Koya, Kui). And some other languages (Bonda, Juanga, Saura) belong to the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). According to the Odisha Primary Education Programme Authority (OPEPA), the regulatory body of the

Department of School and Mass Education, Odisha, which is responsible for the successful implementation of the *Sarva Sikshya Ahiyan* (Education for All) programme of the Govt. of India, “Persons from the community with fluency in the respective mother-tongues as well as competency in second language Odia and third language English are given priority as teachers in these schools.” In Odisha, in addition to the School and Mass Education Department (SME), the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Development Department (SSD) is the key department responsible for the educational development of the tribal students of the state. This department implements all the government welfare schemes targeted at the SC and ST communities of the state. Free education till class X, in residential schools, where everything is provided for free to the students is a flagship scheme of this department. The residential schools of the SSD department are highly sought after, and are always full to their capacity. At present, in Odisha, there are 1670 residential schools with over 4700 hostels, functioning with an enrolment of 4, 50, 000 SC and ST students of which 60% are girls (source: SSD website).

*Information Accessed from Annual Report 2008-2009, SC & ST Development Dept. Govt. of Odisha*

Recognizing the language problem existing in many of the schools run by the SSD department, Language Handbook in four languages i.e. Koya, Desia, Kuvi and Kui has been developed. These bi-lingual dictionaries, containing common conversational phrases, vocabularies related to text books of class I & II and other common words are to be used as a teacher’s support material in the schools having the students from these four language groups. The Academy of Tribal Languages and Culture (ATLC), Odisha has also undertaken project work on collection and compilation of Ho and Saura bilingual dictionaries. Subsequently language handbooks in other tribal languages are also being developed and are today being used widely throughout the state.

*Information Accessed from Tribal Committee Report, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India, 2014*

The Model of Primers in the tribal languages was first developed in Odisha in 1996. One side of the text was in Odia script but used tribal language. The other side of the script was in Odia language and script. The student learnt the script because he/she understood the content. The teacher understood the tribal languages because he/she could read in a known script. The contents were about local trees and fruits, local folk tales and festivals. Some of the text was also about functional literacy such as clean drinking water and common institutions.

From the above information it can be seen that policy makers, government officials, and experts in the field have all been aware of the language problem among the tribals since quite a long period. Yet, it was not until the year 2007 that the government thought of initiating, and actually implementing the MLE programme at the practical level.

### *Continuation of MTB MLE Programme in Odisha*

Information accessed from the School and Mass Education Department website informs that from 2012-13 the government has included nine more tribal languages in the MLE programme. Fourteen languages were surveyed for the purpose according to the department, out of which nine were selected. But oddly, recent data (Nov. 2015) accessed from SME shows that instead of 19 languages, at present, 21 languages in 1485 schools across 17 districts are functional under the MTB MLE programme in the state of Odisha. The objective of the scheme, according to OPEPA is to facilitate transition from 100 per cent tribal language in Class I to 100 per cent Odia by Class VI over a five-year period. The message implicit in the objective, as per general understanding, is to make the six year old tribal language speaking tribal child forget their tribal mother-tongue, and instead completely adopt the dominant language of the state, i.e. Odia, by the time the child is 12 years old.

### **The Present Study**

#### *Study Area:*

Sundargarh District (a scheduled district with a tribal population comprising 50.75% of the total population of the district). 67% rural, 33% urban (2011 census)

Literacy rate: All: 73.34%, ST: 65.08%, (Male: 73.98%, Female: 56.39%)

No. of tribal groups: 6 - 8

Major Tribal languages – Oraon, Munda, Kisan, Khadia, Bhuyian, Gondi

Three subdivisions: Panposh, Bonai, Sundargarh *Sadar* (main), 17 Blocks, 4 municipal (MPL) areas (Rajgangpur, Sundargarh town, Rourkela, Biramitrapur)

#### *Objectives of the Study*

- To understand the issues and challenges involved in the implementation of the MTB MLE programme in the district.
- To generate information on the impact the programme has had on those tribal students who have been a part of this programme and have today graduated to the senior classes.

#### *Methodology*

A qualitative research design was adopted for the study for better access and interpretation of data. Face to face interviews, telephonic conversations, focus groups, and observation methods were applied for accessing and generating information. Data was accessed from all the key stakeholders of the study; the students, school head

teachers, MLE teachers, subject teachers, hostel superintendents, government officials and policy makers to achieve both the ‘practical goals’ and ‘intellectual goals’ of the study. Practical goals are aimed at accomplishing something – meeting some needs, changing some circumstances, or achieving some objective, whereas intellectual goals are aimed at understanding something, gaining insight into the issue at hand, and finding out why this is happening (Maxwell, 2008).

*No. of MLE Schools Accessed:*

Under SC & ST Development Dept. (SSD) – 8 (residential schools)

Under School & Mass Education Dept. (SME) – 9 (day schools)

*No. of Non-MLE Schools Accessed:*

Under SME – 10, Under SSD – 10

**Current MLE Position in Sundargarh District**

The following figures, accessed through my fieldwork provide some key information relating to the current MLE programme in the district:

No. of languages functional under MLE: 4 + 1 (under SME, four are currently functional, one more to be introduced from 2016, already approved by the government); 4 (under SSD)

Languages currently functional under SME: Oraon, Munda, Khadia and Paudi Bhuyian. To be functional in 2016 – Ho (It is to be noted here that Ho language is not considered to be a dominant tribal language of Sundargarh district)

Languages currently functional under SSD: Oraon, Munda, Kisan and Khadia

Total number of primary and upper primary schools under SME in the district - 2924 (Source - OPEPA)

Number of MLE schools under SME - 109

Total number of Residential schools under SSD - 116.

Number of MLE schools under SSD - 13

The number of students in residential schools is much more than SME schools, as informed by the school teachers. This is no surprise as these schools under SSD provide everything for free to the tribal children. The students are admitted to these schools on a first-cum-first-serve basis, and also based on the distance of their villages from the school location. After admission, till the student completes class 10, he/she becomes the responsibility of the state. Every single requirement of the child is taken care of by the

state. In such a context, it is no surprise that the parents who primarily comprise the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category, prefer to put their wards into such schools where all the child's needs are taken care of by the state. In comparison, in SME controlled schools, only the uniform, books and the midday meal comes free for the students.

Total number of MLE teachers under SME - 315

These teachers are placed in 109 schools since 2013-14, approximately three teachers per school, and they are now designated as MLE *Sikshya Sahayaks* (Education Assistants). According to the available statistics another 2815 schools are left out from the benefits of the MLE scheme. Out of these 2815 schools, 1886 are in rural areas and 929 are in urban areas (approximate figures arrived at taking into account the rural-urban ratio in the district). From these figures it can be clearly observed that even if we leave aside the 929 schools located in urban areas, where the tribal children are expected to be conversant with the dominant state language when they enter school, there are large number of schools that are in rural areas. The impact of Hindi, Odia, and even English on the urban school children is quite profound due to their proximity to these dominant languages right from the beginning, and hence Odia does not appear as an alien language to them once they enter school. But the situation is not the same for the rural child. The remaining schools (1886) are located in rural areas, where the tribal children entering schools are not expected to know the state language. The only languages these children are observed to know when they enter school are their mother tongues, or the inter-tribal lingua franca of the district, i.e. Sadri, or Sundargarhi, a local dialect.

At present all the MLE teachers under SME are contractual and till recently were being paid Rs. 5200.00 per month. But in recent days, due to widespread agitation from the teachers, the government has brought out notification increasing the salary of these teachers by an additional Rs. 2200.00. As per government information they are all supposed to be made permanent after six years on the job. All the teachers have completed their higher secondary examination, and have proficiency in their native tongues. Earlier (since 2011-12) these teachers worked as MLE volunteers and did the same work that they are doing now as MLE *Sikshya Sahayaks*. As MLE volunteers they were paid 1500/- per month from the *Sarva Sikhsya Abhiyan* (Education for All) scheme of the Government of India, under the Right to Education programme. Some of them dropped out when they got better offers, but those who have continued have been reinstated as MLE *Sikshya Sahayaks*. Additional numbers of teachers have also been employed today under this scheme.

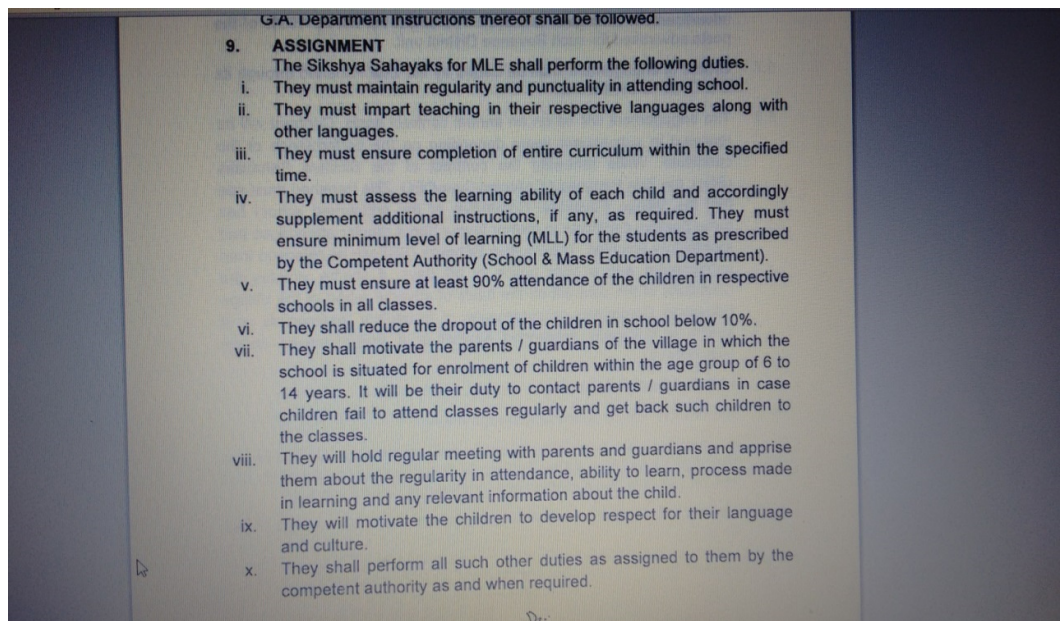
Currently there are 11 MLE teachers working under SSD. These teachers, who are called as Tribal Language Teachers (TLTs), are working since 2009. Initially 13 were placed, but two teachers have dropped out since then. Currently for 116 tribal residential schools in Sundargarh district 11 TLTs are in position. Like their SME counterparts, these all are also contractual teachers. But strangely, even while sharing the same nature



of job with the MLE *Sikshya Sahayaks* of SME, they were being paid Rs.3050.00 per month since the time they had joined their job. It is only recently that their stipend has been increased to Rs. 5200.00, to be at par with their SME counterparts, as per local newspaper reports. Yet ironically, they are again going to be paid less than their SME counterparts as the salary of MLE *Sikshya Sahayaks* are now increased by the government as stated earlier. However, a remarkable detail that needs to be noted here is that these teachers, both TLTs and MLE *Sikshya Sahayaks* are paid less than the Lady Matrons and Cook-cum-attendants posted at the residential hostels. Included in the category of semi-skilled workers these workers are paid more by the government than teachers who are responsible in building up the next generation of citizens of the country.

Caption 3 below highlights some of the assignments of MLE teachers as specified by a government notification dated 6 August 2013.

**Caption 3: Assignments of MLE SS (accessed from an SME Notification)**



*Guidelines under which MLE Teachers are appointed:*

Following are the guidelines under which MLE Teachers are appointed in various schools of the district. The information was elicited from my interaction with the designated officers of the *Sarva Sikshya* programme of the district. The officers follow guidelines provided by the government where decisions are taken at the top level and then passed onto the district level officers for implementation at the ground level.

The following are the guidelines for MLE teacher appointment for School and Mass Education Department:

- In accordance to the requirements of the scheme, the MLE teachers are appointed only in primary or upper primary schools.
- MLE teachers are appointed only in those schools where there are at least 5-6 number classrooms.
- Monolingual situation prevails among the students of the school.
- The school comprises 80% - 100% students from one tribe.
- If the School Management Committee (SMC) informs the district project office about their requirements for MLE teachers, then it is to be taken into account during appointments.

No guidelines for MLE teacher appointments could be accessed for the SC and ST Development Department.

### **Key Findings (for the 1st objective of the study)**

There is absolutely no disputing the benefits of the scheme. But how far the objectives of the scheme are getting fulfilled is the key question. My fieldwork reveals that there is total lack of coordination between the two administering departments (SME and SSD). One set of teachers was being paid 5200.00 till lately, while another set was being paid 3050.00, with nature of work, and qualification of teachers remaining the same. SME MLE teachers have been assured of permanent positions after 6 years in service. SSD MLE teachers were continuing on 3050.00 since 2009. They have no assurance from the government as to when their jobs would be regularised. This has resulted in total lack of motivation towards their jobs. Some have dropped out while some others are continuing, as otherwise they would be jobless.

Relatively speaking, SME schools were observed to be functioning in a more organised way than schools under SSD. SME school students get the primers regularly from the Project office. But, SSD schools have never received any tribal language primers. Additionally, no SSA official has also ever contacted the headmasters of residential schools to collect the primers from the district office. Some interesting findings were also noted relating to the teaching assignments being given to the MLE teachers in the residential schools. SSD MLE teachers teach all subjects, and not necessarily only in the primary classes. Due to shortage of teachers in most schools, the school management is forced to take the assistance of these teachers to teach other subjects and in any assigned class. One tribal language teacher was observed to have been teaching Hindi and Sanskrit to classes 7 and 8. In this particular school his role as an MLE teacher was non-existent. To quote the teacher himself, “the school does not have any Hindi or Sanskrit teacher. So I have been assigned the task of taking these subjects.” Another TLT teaches Science and Maths to all the classes (1-7) in her upper primary school. She makes use of her responsibility as a TLT only when students specifically ask about something in the subject books that they do not understand and which are written in the state language. This is only time that she uses the tribal language with her students inside the class hours. This was validated by the students in all the accessed SSD

schools. They repeatedly said that they had been taught only in Odia. Many a time students were also observed to already know Odia, Sundargarhi or Sadri when they join school. This of course aids towards better understanding of the school language and subsequently the book language.

Another notable fact that was highlighted by all the headmasters and the subject teachers, including the MLE teachers, was that by class 3 students were all seen to be becoming well-versed in Odia, irrespective of whether an MLE teacher was appointed in the school or not. Presence of an MLE teacher made the path relatively smooth for the children, wherever the program was functioning well. Otherwise even, with the help of local teachers, senior students, matrons and cooks of the hostels, the headmasters try to ease the language problems faced by the students in the initial period of their stay. Hence within two to three years students become well-versed in the regional language, and develop the capability required to handle the senior classes, as perceived by the teachers themselves. This observation is significant if we take into account the concepts of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CLAP), sometimes denoted only as academic proficiency, contrasted with Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), or conversational fluency (Cummins, 1979). Academic proficiency necessitates that students are able to use their second language in academic contexts, in addition to situations that demand a higher level of logical and analytical skills. BICS on the other hand are language skills needed in social situations primarily to interact with other people. According to Cummins (1979), these contexts do not require specialised language knowledge, and they do not challenge the speaker cognitively. These language skills have been observed to be developed within six months to two years after exposure to a new language. The question that needs to be asked here is whether the language skills that these tribal students display after two three years of their exposure to the state language, is to be categorised as BICS, or to be considered as CLAP. The high dropout rates and the poor exam results exhibited by these students certainly give us some information on the answer to the given question.

Other important findings from the study suggests that even though headmasters and teachers of non-MLE schools said they would prefer having an MLE teacher in their school, it is definitely not one of their priorities. One head master was not even aware of the responsibilities of an MLE teacher. He treats his MLE teacher as any other teacher of the school and assigns teaching responsibilities accordingly. The headmasters were observed to more concerned with the infrastructure of the school, lack of adequate number of classrooms, shortage of teachers, lack of proper hostel facilities in case of residential schools, poor exam results, funding, school management etc. as elicited from the FGDs. During SMC meetings parents primarily complain about the quality of food and other free benefits provided by the government. Appointment of MLE teachers in the schools is not given much importance by the parents, as said by the headmasters. There have also been instances where parents have called up the district project office to stop the appointment of an MLE teacher as otherwise that would have led to the transfer of an existing teacher of the school, which for various reasons they did not want to

happen. The parents are mostly uneducated and they prefer sending their children to residential schools so that the child's basic requirements are fulfilled till completion of high school. In the MLE SSD schools, in the past six years nobody has ever visited the MLE teachers to ask about their issues and problems. They work as teachers, not as TLTs, and are not accountable to anyone relating to their TLT position in the schools. In SME schools MLE teacher appointments have been made taking into account 80-100% single tribal language situation. As a result 109 schools have roughly 3 MLE teachers each, while other schools with more number of tribal students have been left out. As per received information very few schools have children from a single language. Children with various mother-tongues study together in one school.

### *Some Positive Findings*

Among the accessed SME schools wherever MLE teachers are provided the programme was observed to be running smoothly. There are less number of students as compared to residential schools for reasons mentioned earlier, and more than two MLE teachers for each school. The students enjoy the company of these teachers. As a result the learning process for the small children was observed to be relatively easy and enjoyable. The primers, with the words in their mother tongues on one side and the concurrent Odia words on the other side make things clear and comprehensible for the students. In some instances it was seen that the teachers are also learning the language of the students (for e.g., some Oraon MLE teachers have started learning Sadri from the students).

### **Key Findings (for the 2nd objective of the study)**

#### *Impact on the Students*

No immediate impact on their studies could be observed. Further research needs to be conducted to understand the benefits of the MLE program on the academic growth of the students. It is only recently (since 2012), with the appointment of MLE volunteers and later on MLE *Sikhsya Sahayaks* that the scheme in its real sense is functional in Sundargarh district. But, some social impact could be observed. Certain complex social issues exist at a latent level which the MTB MLE approach has not been able to address till now. The students were reluctant to admit that they spoke a tribal language at home or among themselves. Odia was held to be used at home. The reasons for such behaviour among the children could be the reason that since their teachers repeatedly tell them to use Odia more, and even the parents are also advised to speak in Odia to their children during vacations, the students were probably reluctant to admit that they spoke any other language at home other than Odia. There seems to be a perceived notion among the students that Odia is a much more important language to use and speak, rather than their own home language.

Shin (2013) speaks of a societal language (high variety) and a home/community language (low variety) in a bilingual society. Bilingualism usually describes the use of two or more languages by an individual. But we do not use two languages for exactly

the same purpose. Linguists have coined the term diglossia to refer to such specific language situations.

*A typical distribution for high and low varieties in diglossia based on Shin's notation of the same:*

Context	high variety	low variety
Conversation with family and friends		√
Social interaction in the community		√
Storytelling in classrooms		√
Oral language teachers use to converse with pupils		√
Academic textbooks	√	
Language used for higher education	√	
Language widely used in the society	√	
Political speeches	√	
TV, cinema and mass media	√	

When we consider the above it is no wonder that students hesitate to reveal anything about their language preferences. Sometimes they even try to conceal their tribal identity behind ambiguous names. Parents enrol their children in schools without the family name that can reveal their tribal identity. Right from the day they start school they understand that they need to speak and write in Odia, which is essential for their progress. They realize that they are deficient in the school language which is important for them to learn and progress in life, and mother-tongues are not very important. Parents also understand this. Cummins (2001) suggests that in these situations children are “identified for what they cannot do rather than what they can, which leads to feelings of disempowerment and academic failure.” Under these circumstances teachers also need to understand that the “social context of education is as important as mastering the content material and pedagogical techniques” (Shin 2013). The whole process has resulted in subtractive language learning instead of additive language learning, which was the primary motive behind the MTB MLE scheme, as envisioned by the policy makers.

## Conclusion and Further Reflections

Data elicited from all the stakeholders reveal that even though the scheme is formulated with all the right intentions, there are still numerous issues that need to be handled at the implementation level for the scheme to be designated as successful in its right sense. At present the whole objective as we understand is to somehow get the students to learn Odia so that they are able to handle the higher classes. By class 3 majority of the students are perceived to have learnt Odia. The state government's policy of no exams till class 8 has also resulted in students not taking their studies seriously. As revealed by the teachers, *dandamukta* (punishment free) classrooms have also resulted in children not listening to the teachers.

Crystal (2000) suggests that a minority language will progress if its speakers:

- ✓ Increase their prestige within the dominant community;
- ✓ Increase their wealth relative to the dominant community;
- ✓ Increase their legitimate power in the eyes of the dominant community;
- ✓ Have a strong presence in the educational system;
- ✓ Can write their language down

The question that we need to ask is – are all these things happening? The need of the hour then is to come up with strategies that can aid towards building up the prestige of the languages of the tribals first among the tribal communities themselves, and then among all the other stakeholders involved. Bottoms up initiatives are urgently required with participatory meetings among trained officials, and parents, teachers and headmasters of schools which can educate everyone on the importance of mother tongues in the ‘ecology of languages’ (Haugen 1972). Only when the parents and the teachers themselves understand the importance of the children’s mother tongues in academic success, then can they pass it on to their children. Proper coordination among programme administering government departments is also urgently required for better implementation of the scheme at the grassroots level. Another positive revision that can be done by the authorities is to follow the Chhattisgarh model primers, where in addition to six mother tongues and the state language, parallel English words are also included to make the children identify different languages and different cultural situations during the learning process (John, 2015).

#### *Scope for Further Research*

This study has been done on a relatively small scale as yet. More number of schools and other stakeholders need to be accessed to get a clearer picture of the MTB MLE situation in the district. This study can be further extended to other districts of the state. As per newspaper reports on the conditions of primary schools in remote tribal areas of the state, many schools are functional only on records, but “closed in reality” (Pattnaik, 2016). The reasons cited for the dismal state of affairs are the remoteness of the schools and lack of Odia knowledge among the residents of the village. Further empirical studies also need to be conducted to understand the impact of the MTB MLE scheme on the academic output of the students.

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